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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iraq - Legislative elections
Iran

PARIS - Friday, December 16, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iraq - Legislative elections
Iran

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Although only the second of today's top international stories, the elections in Iraq are the lead for Le Figaro which headlines "Iraq: Democracy Settles in." Le Figaro reports that President Bush called the Iraqi elections "a major step forward toward American objectives: to have a democratic Iraq capable, of governing and defending itself, a country that will be an ally in the war on terrorism, that sets a strong example for other countries in the region ...such as Iran or Syria." The article notes that his recent campaign to explain US objectives in Iraq is "bearing fruit," and slide in his public support seems to have stopped. For Liberation "The Iraqis Voted en Masse." Jean-Pierre Perrin reports on Washington's support for Allawi while Le Monde reports on President Bush's interview on Fox news, which it titles "President Bush Acknowledges Having Made 'Tactical Errors.'" Several regional editorials praise the "progress of democracy" which according to Jean Levallois of La Presse de la Manche is "a clear message sent to the international community, but even more so to the terrorists." (See Part C)

Le Figaro interviews Christopher Gelpi of the University of North Carolina at Duke, who contends: "U.S. public opinion is on the brink of shift regarding troop withdrawal from Iraq."

Le Figaro carries an op-ed inviting Europe to re-call its Ambassadors from Iran further to Ahmadinejad's latest revisionism statements. Another op-ed uses the example of Iran and the EU-3s diplomatic failings to oppose the roles of diplomacy to the military. (See Part C)

Liberation reports that for a number of French citizens "it may not be a Merry Christmas" because of the need for visas to enter the U.S. "The Embassy in Paris is swamped with requests" because France is not able to provide the required biometric passports due to a conflict with its national printing agency. Liberation carries a letter to the editor entitled: "U.S. Visas of Mistrust" that bemoans all the documents required in order to get a visa: "I realize that when we are in the U.S. Consulate we are on foreign territory, but still I do not understand how the Foreign Ministry accepts such invasion of privacy without a multilateral agreement. So yes, in the end, you don't have to go to the U.S. We can boycott the U.S. or hope our ministry can put an end to this scandalous procedure between two developed democratic and supposedly 'friendly' nations for as long as biometric passports remain unavailable in France."

The confrontation between Paris and London over the EU budget is a major story. But in Catholic La Croix the Vice President of the EU Commission on Budgetary issues explains: "even if there is no agreement in Brussels, this will not necessarily lead to budgetary chaos. We still have another year to find an agreement."

Economic Les Echos reports on European defense industry alliances as Defense Minister Alliot-Marie gave the go-ahead to the consolidation of the French naval military industry sector. In his editorial, Patrick Lamm writes: "this consolidation makes perfect sense because the theatres of operation are increasingly moving to the seas and coastal areas. The merger between Thales and DCN will give them more opportunities, even if they still have to deal with the world leaders, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics." Separately La Tribune reports that France's Areva could get four contracts to build nuclear plants in China taking them away from Westinghouse.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iraq

"Iraqis Send a Message to the Terrorists"

Jean Levallois in regional Presse de la Manche (12/16): "In Iraq, democracy continues to make progress. Hope is marching on. Under bombs, with tears and blood, and despite the blind terror of the terrorists, Iraq is electing its government. The conditions under which the Iraqis are going to the ballots are terrible, as each time before. But the gesture of all Iraqis who are choosing to vote speaks for itself. It is a message sent to the international community, but even more to the terrorists."

"Defying the Terrorists"

Andre Schlecht in regional l'Alsace (12/16): "Now that they are free of their dictator, the Iraqis know what they must do. In a country where the physical risks of participating in a democratic election are high, the number of candidates and the obvious mobilization of voters are proof that all understand the value of their newly found liberties. Ignoring the cries of the extremists who denounce democracy as an instrument of the devil, no single group, ethnic or religious, has called for a boycott of the elections. This increasing belief in political reform is a courageous cry of defiance to the proponents of obscurantism and the henchmen of the former dictatorship."

"Washington Votes for Allawi"

Jean-Pierre Perrin in left-of-center Liberation (12/16): "There is a big step from elections to the country's unity. Each community is indeed voting more for its own future than for Iraq's. And this is what worries Washington, just when it is beginning to plan for its troop withdrawal. There is the fear that a new government dominated by the Shiites, far from resolving the situation, might play into the hands of the Sunnis. Hence Washington's calculations of a return of Allawi and a possible coalition with liberal Sunnis."

"President Bush's Third Election"

Olivier Picard in regional Les Dernieres Nouvelles d'Alsace (12/16): "For the history books, the legislative elections taking place in Iraq will probably have more impact for President Bush's legacy than the other two elections, his own. President Bush is 'taking responsibility' in order to better control things. He has even consulted the Democrats, a gesture he has not made since the beginning of the intervention in Iraq. The fact is that the war no longer amuses our Texas cowboy, who would like to bring back the GIs home and dares to say it out loud. But he knows it will be a long process, and even France is no longer that eager to see the U.S. Army abandon Iraq to absolute chaos. In truth, President Bush is suffering from the Nixon syndrome. thirty-three years later, and even if the two situations are not exactly alike."

Iran

"European Ambassadors Should Leave Tehran"

Researcher Therese Delpech in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/16): "It is time we recognized who is Ahmadinejad, to draw the necessary conclusions. There is a time when diplomatic statements must take a back seat to non-ambiguous action. Ahmadinejad is convinced he can do as he pleases, especially with the Europeans. namely because everyone is acting as if they did not know how dangerous he is. Through this attitude Europe helps to re-enforce Ahmadinejad's position in Iran as well as abroad. We must therefore move to a higher level of reaction: we must recall our ambassadors. This is all the more important because revisionism is banned by law in several countries, including France. The EU-3 must also act in connection with Iran's violation of the NPT. This is also the opportunity for Austria to explain to the world the involvement of Ahmadinejad in the assassination of the Kurdish leader, Ghassemlou in Vienna in 1989. We must remember two things: Ahmadinejad has no way to fulfill his promises to the Iranian people. Therefore the danger is real of him continuing on this road. The second is that the Europeans have zero credibility in Tehran because they have demonstrated their inability to implement their threats. This is the time to change that."

"The Diplomat and the Soldier: a New Hierarchy"

Jean-Jacques Roche in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/16): "The patent failure of European diplomacy when it comes to Iran and the nuclear crisis cannot be explained exclusively by the election of a populist president and the disappearance of the threat of a U.S. military intervention. The troika was probably wise in privileging a diplomatic approach; but its approach is anachronistic when it opposes negotiations to the use of force and when it continues to uphold a hierarchy that is outdated and which places the diplomat above the soldier. Because of new threats, international intervention has become the norm and replaced the very conservative concept of non-intervention. Even if the soldier is sometimes working blind, the diplomat is even less well-equipped to deal with terrorists. Hence today's negotiations have become arm-wrestling matches where one doesn't hesitate to strike in order to convince the other to negotiate. Diplomacy has become coercive, as it did in Kosovo. Today diplomacy would like to

be preemptive. But faced with a distant enemy, diplomatic negotiations appear so ill-equipped that military doctrines must prepare for more frequent uses of force despite the obvious risks of collateral damage." STAPELTON